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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR X0XX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Aftermath of Likud Primaries

Key stories in the media:

Major media reported that yesterday Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu took legal steps to change the party's Knesset slate, hours after the announcement of the results of Monday's primary in which many hawks prevailed, while more dovish candidates faltered. However, a HaQaretz-Dialog poll shows Likud to be gaining strength

in voters. (See below.) The media quoted Netanyahu as saying that would pursue negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians. Leading media quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying yesterday that the political path that the Likud is taking would isolate Israel from the international community.

HaQaretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert is due to meet with DM Ehud Barak and FM Tzipi Livni today to discuss the future of the Gaza lull, a day after Olmert threatened that Israel would lash out against Gaza militants in response to a recent escalation in rocket and mortar fire from Gaza.

HaQaretz reported that the Public Committee against Torture in Israel is demanding that the Attorney General order a criminal investigation to determine whether any crimes were committed in the planning and execution of previous targeted assassinations. Israel Radio quoted Richard Falk, the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian territories, as saying yesterday that Israeli policies against Palestinians amounted to a crime against humanity. HaQaretz reported that most Israelis view human rights organizations as hostile to Israel, according to a recent survey sponsored by Bar-Ilan University's political science department in honor of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The telephone poll, which was conducted by the Kivun Institute two weeks ago, found that 64 percent of Israelis consider human rights groups like Amnesty International and the Israel-based B'Tselem to be anti-Israel. More than half (55 percent) of respondents said Israel protects human rights better than Western democracies. The Jerusalem Post reported that Anti-Semitism experts in Germany, the U.S., and Israel are leading an escalating assault on Berlin's Center for Research on Anti-Semitism, accusing the center and its director, Wolfgang Benz, of equating Islamophobia with anti-Semitism while ignoring Iran's genocidal threats toward Israel and trivializing the Holocaust.

Yediot reported that the State Prosecution will indict Olmert even if the Talansky case is not completed.

Citing Reuters, HaQaretz quoted a UN spokesman as saying yesterday that the Quartet will meet with Arab foreign ministers at UN headquarters in New York on December 15.

Yesterday Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited fears among Kadima that the release of Palestinian prisoners could harm the party primaries.

Yediot quoted Rabbi and Prof. Daniel HersHKowitz, the chosen chairman of the new right-wing party, Habayit Hayehudi (The Jewish Home), as saying that his party's elected members will have freedom of choice in diplomatic issues.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Hizbullah has declined to meet with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter during his current visit to Lebanon.

Maariv reported that members of Chabad will march in the streets of Mumbai during the Chanukah festival.

HaQaretz and other media reported that as of this week, families who immigrated to Israel from the U.S will be eligible for a \$25,000 grant if they choose to settle in the Golan and Galilee. The grant will come from the immigration-assistance organization Nefesh B'Nefesh and the Russell Berrie Foundation of Teaneck, New Jersey.

All media reported on a recent Ministry of Education report that the math scores of high school students are declining. The media viewed the results as proof of further degradation of the educational system.

HaQaretz presented the results of the Dialog poll held yesterday on the Israelis' voting intentions for the Knesset elections (in parentheses: difference from last poll) Likud: 36 Knesset seats (+2); Kadima: 27 (+1); Labor: 12 (+2). According to a Yediot poll conducted yesterday by Mina Zemach/Dahaf Polling Institute, Likud loses only 1 Knesset seat (31 from 32).

Aftermath of Likud Primaries:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QVoters who believe that perpetuating the situation in the territories endangers Israel's future as a Jewish state, threatens its international ties and undermines its relations with its Arab neighbors will now [after the Likud primaries] have an easier time choosing the ballot slip that suits their worldview.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThe outcome of the Likud primary demonstrated that Netanyahu does not lead his party; his party leads him. This is an inauspicious beginning for a person who wishes to return to leading the country.

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: QThe victory of [the Likud conservatives] is an unequivocal message to the Israelis: Forget about a peace process.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIn the wake of the primary results, Netanyahu urgently needs to tell his Knesset candidates, the voting public, and Israel's allies abroad what his party now stands for. Otherwise others, to his detriment, will be only too ready to define it for him.

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QThe Likud's popularity in the polls doesn't stem from Benjamin Netanyahu's aura, but from the wish to pursue another course that can lead in the opposite direction than the one Israelis have been led to for many years.

Block Quotes:

I. "Likud Turns Right"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/10): QA quick glance at the top 30 candidates [elected in the Likud primaries] reveals a right-wing, if not extreme right-wing group that has opposed any iota of a peace initiative, from the Oslo Accords to the Annapolis Declaration. Likud's voters have raised the curtain to reveal a team that includes people who revolted against Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan and have reservations about the peace agreement signed by Menachem Begin with Egypt. Likud's list for the Knesset is not in line with the image of the moderate statesman that Netanyahu is trying to create. Whether Netanyahu was aiming at the same objective, or whether the party has deviated to the right more than he would have wished, the result is in no way ambiguous. Most of the leading candidates built their reputations on support for the settlement enterprise, opposition to any concessions toward the Palestinians and protests against the attempt to renew negotiations with Syria. A few of them stood out because of their initiatives to clip the wings of the High Court of Justice.... The bad news is that an important party that held the reins of power for many years did not have the sense to put at its helm people who can offer an alternative to the old Likud, whose path was strewn with security and political crises. As prime minister from 1996 to 1999, Netanyahu observed the international reality and regional challenges up close, so we could have expected him to try to put at his side a pragmatic and balanced team instead of wooing an aggressive general, retired athlete and mediocre entertainer. The good news is that the old-new list sharpens the differences between Likud, Kadima and the Labor Party. Voters who believe that perpetuating the situation in the territories endangers Israel's future as a Jewish state, threatens its international ties and undermines its relations with its Arab neighbors will now have an easier time choosing the ballot slip that suits their worldview.

II. "Netanyahu's Party Leads Him, Not the Other Way Around"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/10): QNetanyahu promises that if elected, he will promote the negotiations with

Syria and breathe new life into the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. He is secretly conveying reassuring messages both to the Americans and to the Arabs. The list that the Likud has chosen sends the opposite message to all these parties: Netanyahu is a hostage in the hands of the extreme right wing.... Any attempt by Netanyahu, if he becomes prime minister, to engage in real diplomatic moves, will connect this group [of Likud conservatives] with the ideological right wing, with Benny Begin, Ruby Rivlin, and [former chief of staff Moshe] Bugi Yaalon, and separately with Moshe Feiglin. Any attempt to stabilize the economy will meet with the faction's lack of seriousness and its talent for losing the public's confidence. The problems facing the country, from Iran to the pension funds, are very severe. The Likud has not yet heard about them....

Netanyahu sought to convey a message last night that nothing had happened, and all was as usual: He would form a government whose policy would be moderate and advocate negotiations. I have no doubt that he means every word: The question is whether he is capable. The outcome of the Likud primary demonstrated that Netanyahu does not lead his party; his party leads him. This is an inauspicious beginning for a person who wishes to return to leading the country.

III. QThe Right Wing's List and the Left Wing's Challenge

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (12/10): QThe new leadership of this important right-wing party [Likud] contains no one who has ever been seen as a supporter of the processes that the entire world supports, which is willing to agree to the Saudi initiative, which can be an address for the next U.S. administration. The victory of this group is an unequivocal message to the Israelis: Forget about a peace process. It is also an unequivocal message to the world: we are outside -Q a people that dwells alone. The new Jewish ghetto is located here.... Netanyahu tried to prevent the nightmare that took place yesterday. Evidently he realized better than others what sort of human picture could be drawn if he remained idle. But he failed miserably. Neither he himself nor the respected people who were elected to the top of his list will receive the trust of the center stream of the State of Israel if the peace camp is wise enough to work together, warn of the dangers and suggest a real alternative.

IV. "Whose Likud?"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/10): QThe Likud's membership deliberately chose representatives, many of whom are sincerely and firmly opposed to any territorial compromise -- not because of the way things now stand with the Palestinians, but, it seems, always and forever. Such policies, however, cannot be reconciled with the need for Israel to remain a Jewish and democratic state. Israel cannot forever manage the lives of millions of antagonistic Palestinian Arabs. It is thus in our interest to separate ourselves from them. Last month, Netanyahu declared that he would Qadvance peace talks with the Palestinians in order to gain a stable, safe and prosperous peace.Q He said he wanted to Qmove both the political negotiationsQ and an economic peace plan Qforward.Q In the wake of the primary results, Netanyahu urgently needs to tell his Knesset candidates, the voting public, and Israel's allies abroad what his party now stands for. Otherwise others, to his detriment, will be only too ready to define it for him.

1V. "The LikudQs Opportunity"

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/10): QThere is hardly any movement in Israel whose ideological and historical base are as relevant today as it was when Zeev Jabotinsky created it in the 20th century.... The LikudQs popularity in the polls doesnQt stem from Benjamin NetanyahuQs aura, but from the wish to pursue another course that can lead in the opposite direction than the one Israelis have been led to for many years -Q the opposite direction from Oslo, the opposite way from Qdisengagement, the opposite way from QcalmQ.... Perhaps for the first time [Likud] can bring into fruition this new-old course.